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Nakao

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(54) **ENDOSCOPE WITH OPEN CHANNELS**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **600/153**; 600/104; 600/111; 600/120; 600/121; 600/122; 600/123; 600/124; 600/125; 600/154; 600/155; 600/156

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 600/121–125, 600/153, 156, 104

See application file for complete search history.

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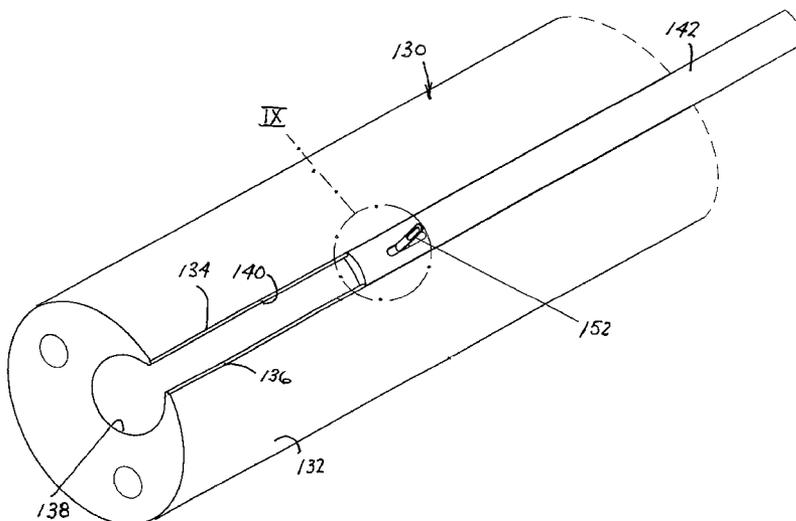
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An endoscope with a flexible elongate insertion shaft, an illumination guide extending longitudinally through the insertion shaft, and an image guide extending longitudinally through the insertion shaft. The insertion shaft is formed along an outer surface with at least one longitudinally extending channel longitudinally traversable by an elongate endoscopic instrument. The channel having a longitudinally extending slot so that the channel is open to the ambient environment along at least a portion of its length.

13 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



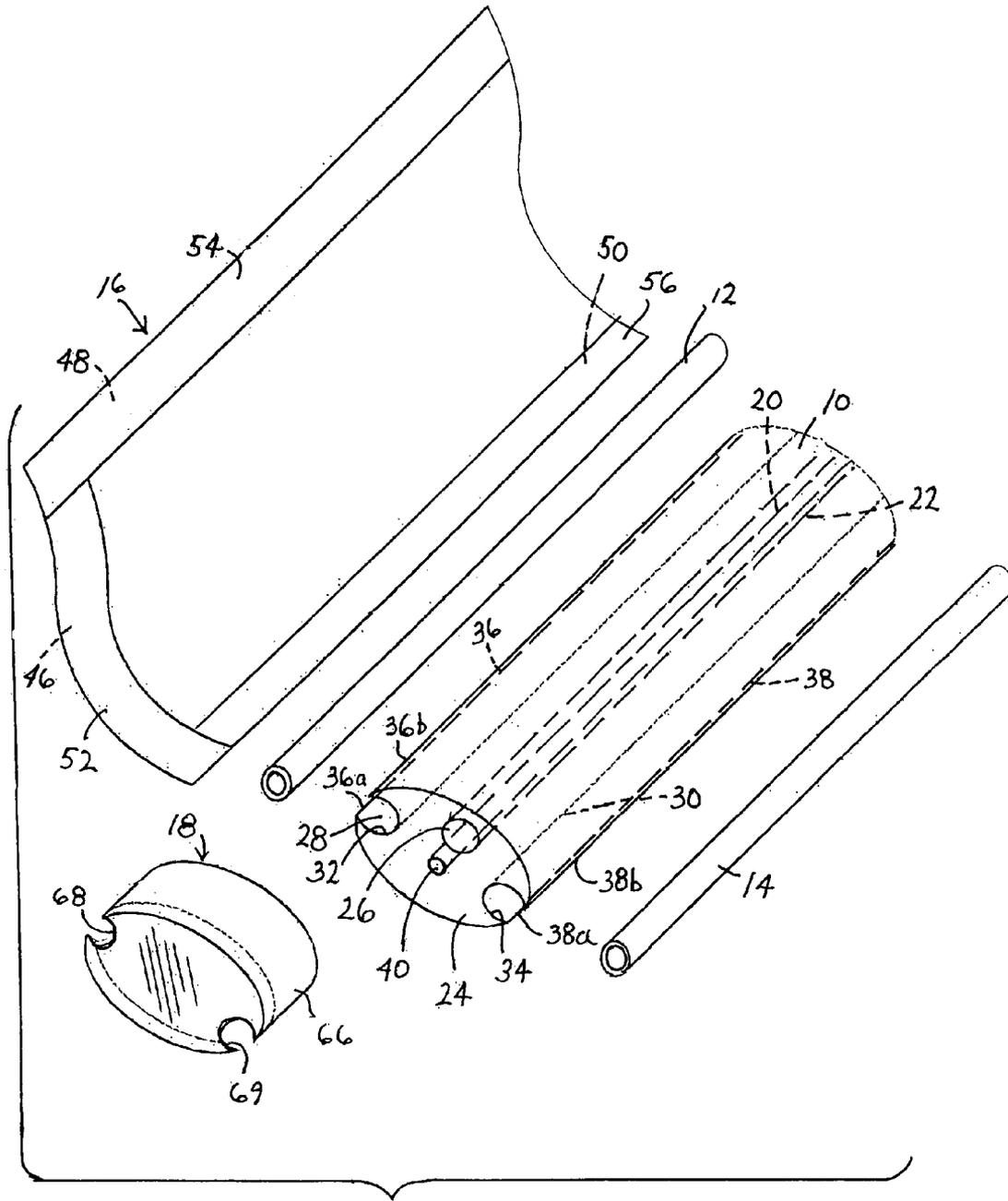
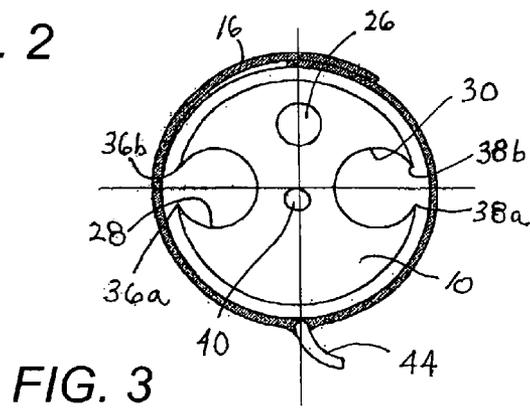
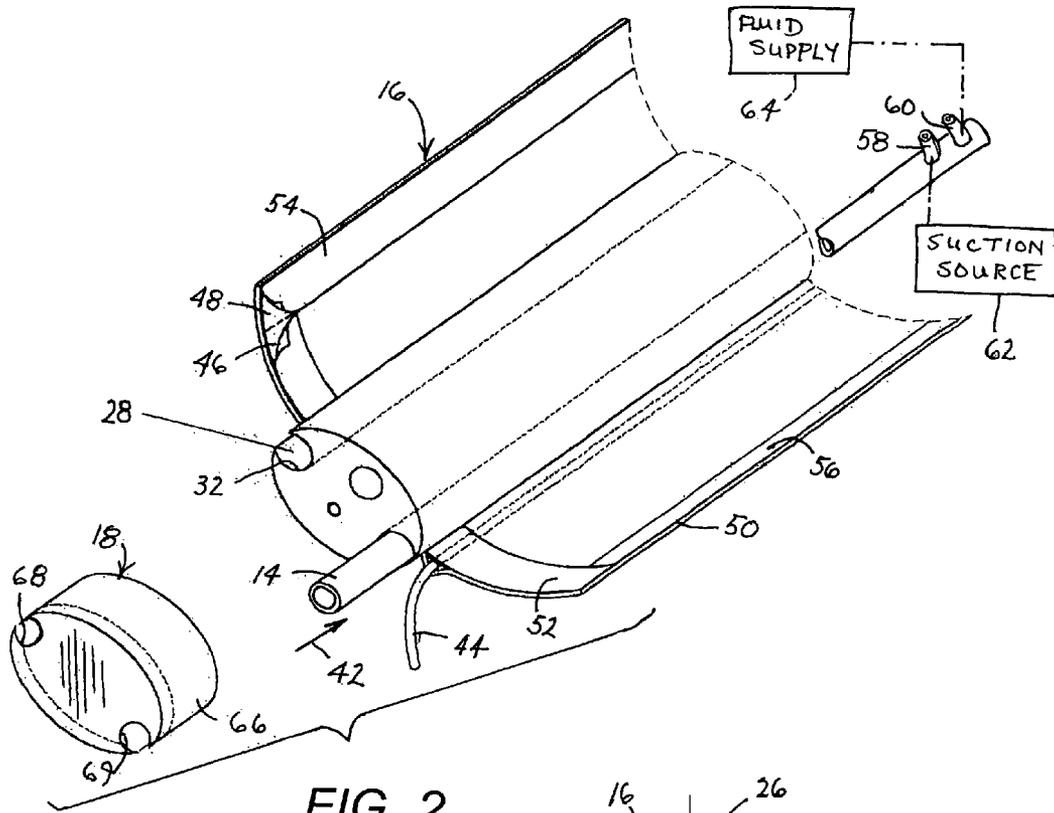


FIG. 1



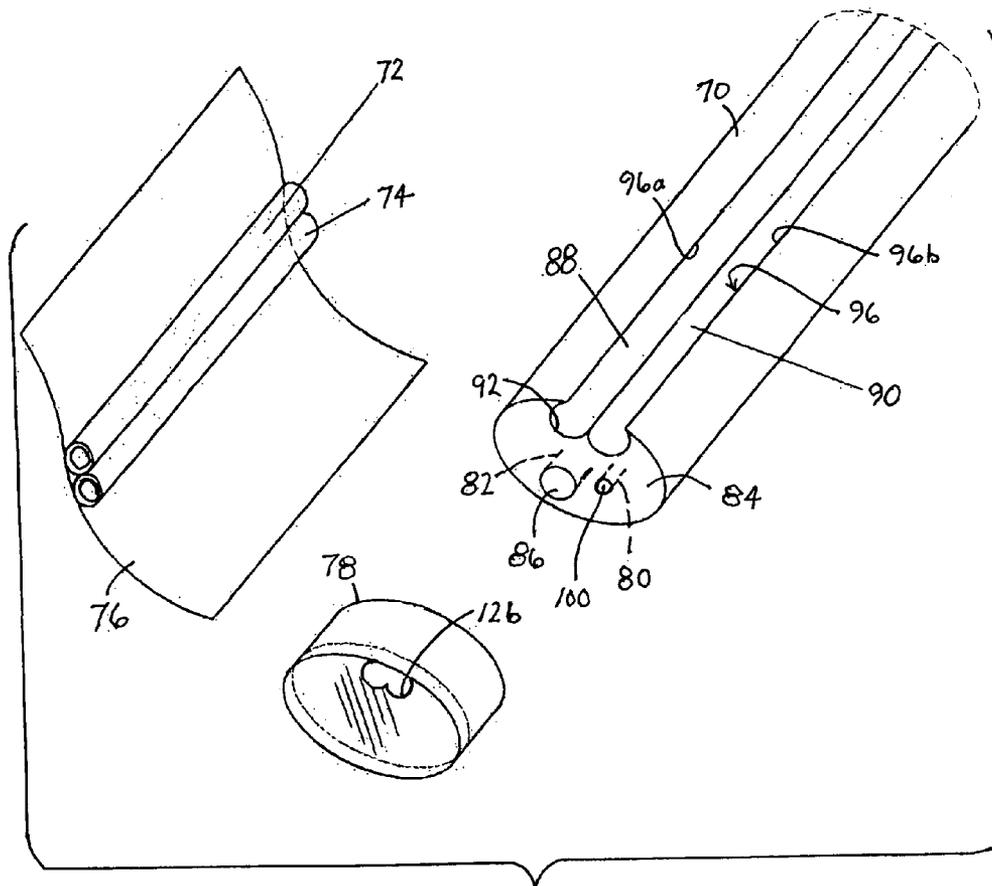


FIG. 4

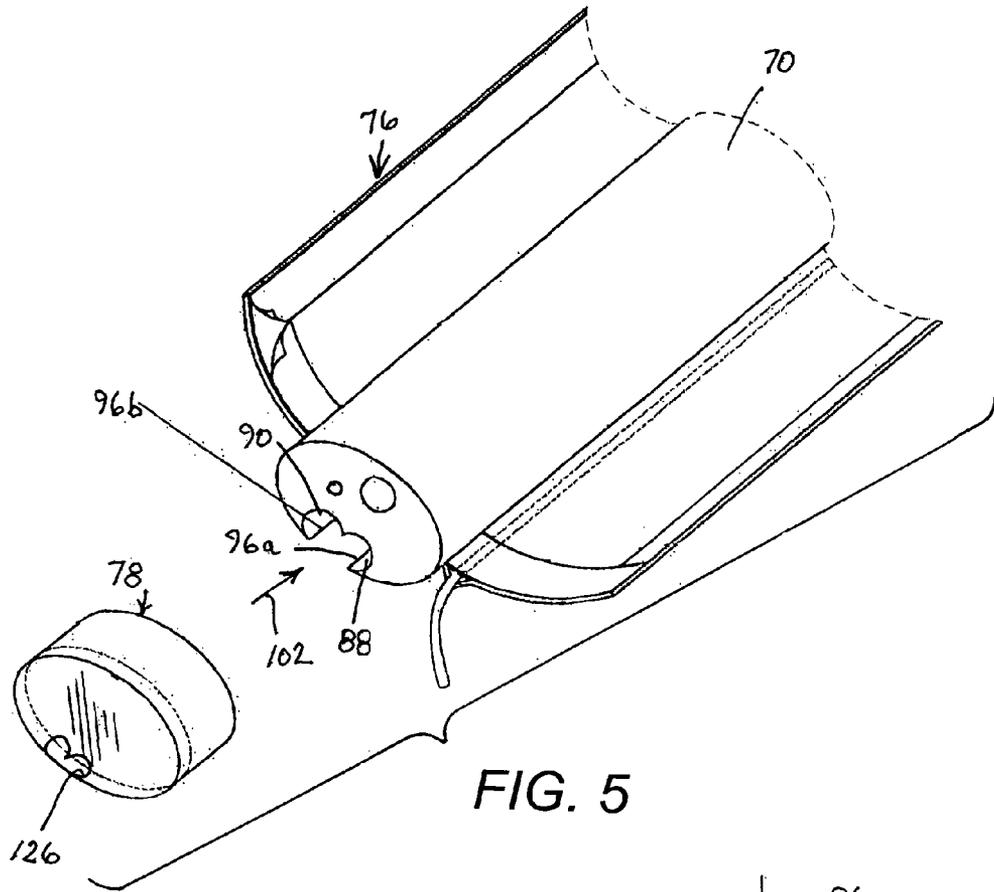


FIG. 5

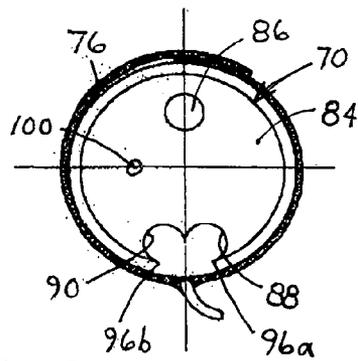


FIG. 6

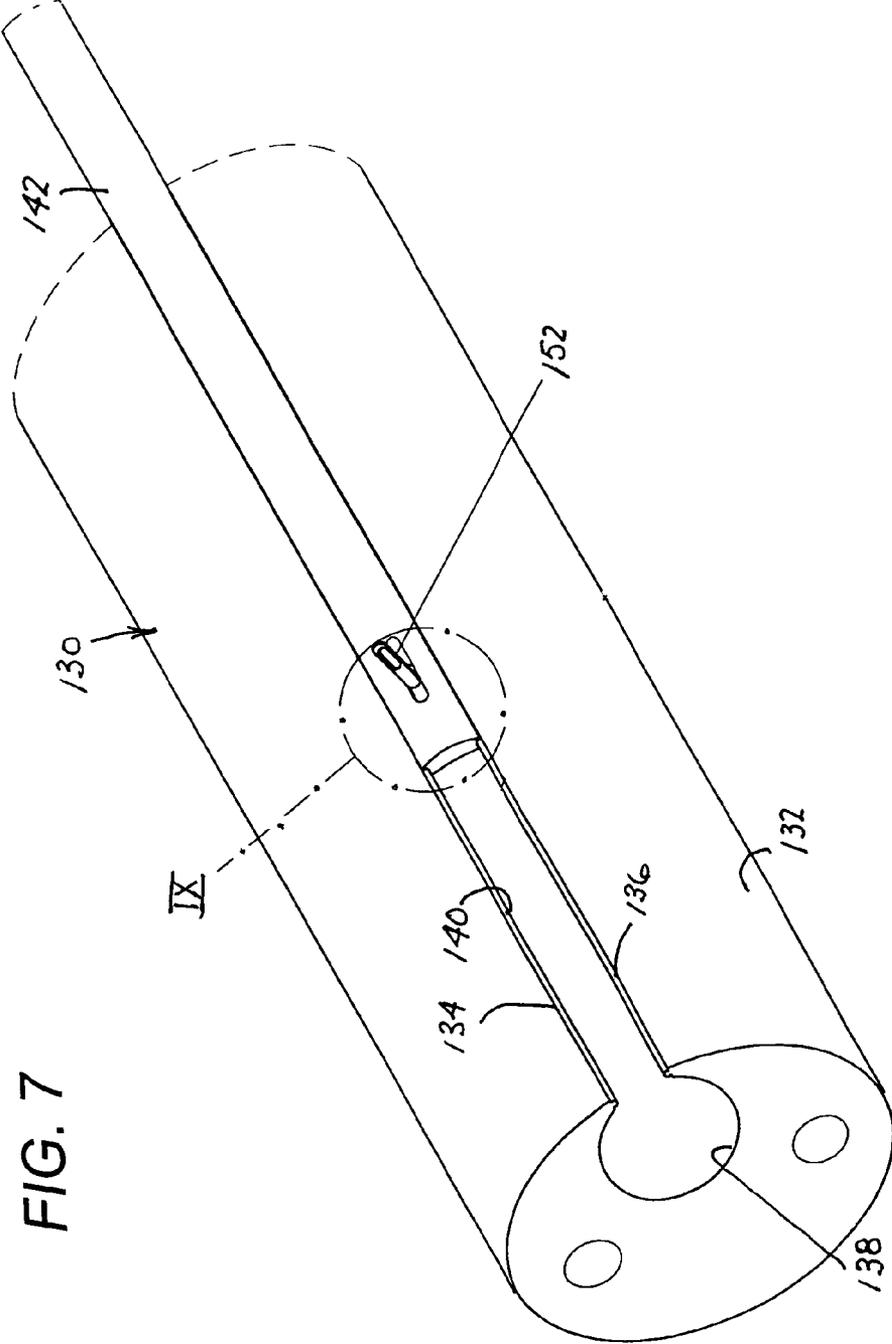
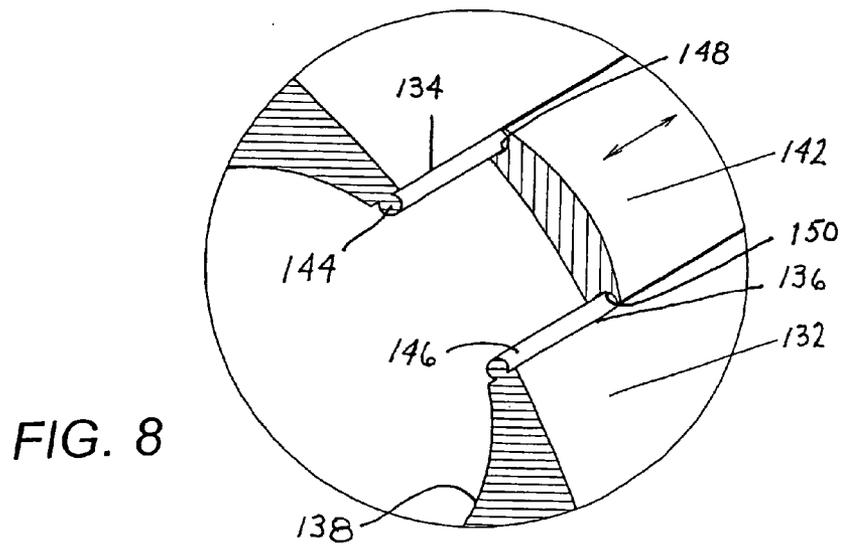
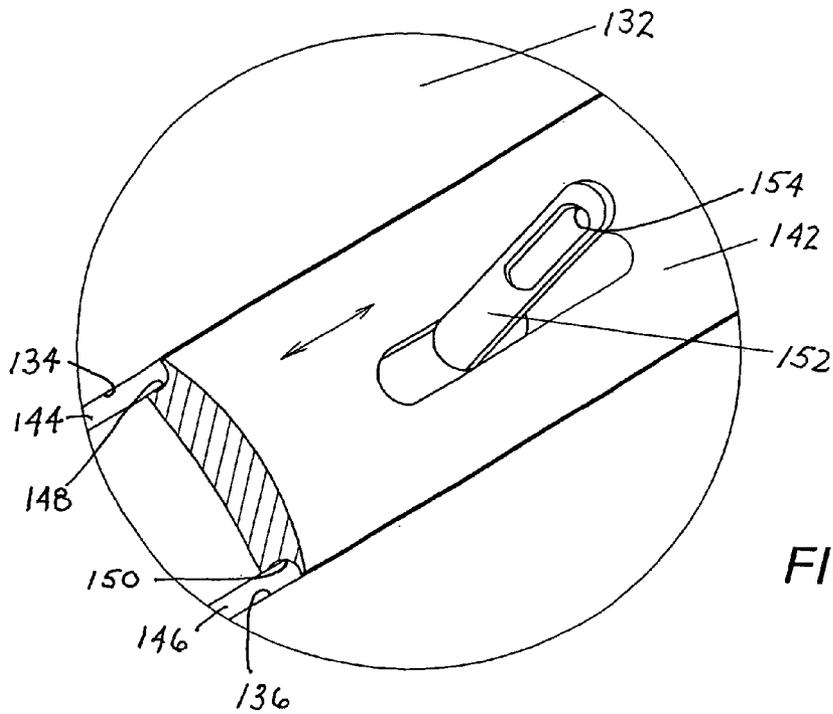


FIG. 7



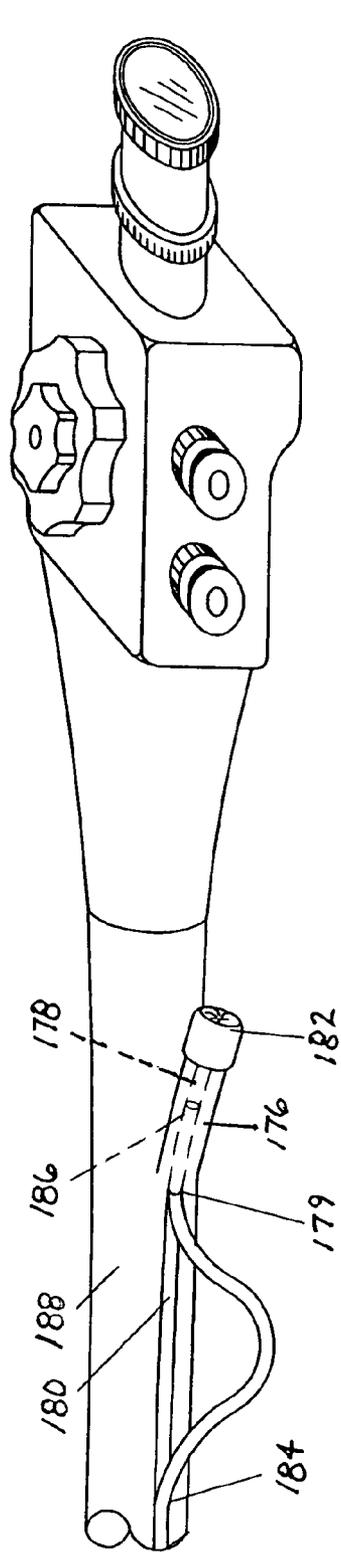


FIG. 11

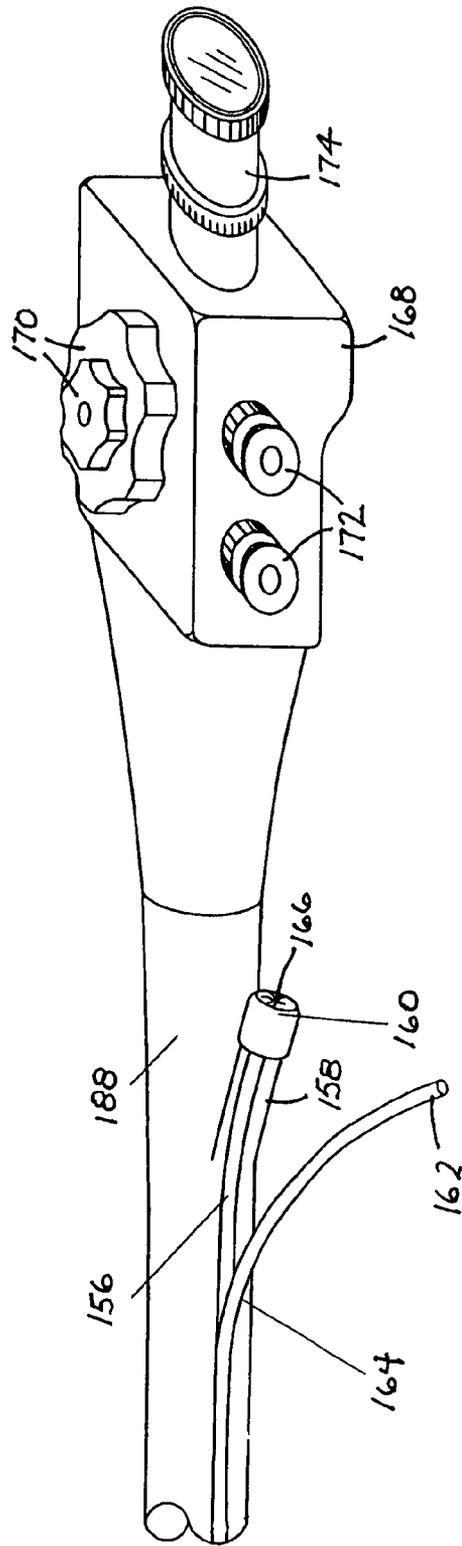


FIG. 10

ENDOSCOPE WITH OPEN CHANNELS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention related to endoscopes. More particularly, this invention relates to flexible fiberoptic endoscopes, i.e., endoscopes with flexible insertion members.

The flexible fiberoptic endoscope is considered according to the Food and Drug Association (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to have the status of a semi-critical requirement for disinfection or sterilization. The definition of semi-critical is: "A device that comes into contact with intact mucous membranes and does not ordinarily penetrate sterile tissue". These devices should receive at least high level disinfection, defined as the destruction of all vegetative microorganisms, mycobacteria, small or non-lipid viruses, medium or lipid viruses, fungal spores and bacterial spores. The steps to achieve such disinfection are long and arduous, and all healthcare personnel in the endoscopy suite must adhere to the standard infection control recommendations in order to protect both patients and healthcare workers.

Multi-society guidelines for reprocessing flexible gastrointestinal endoscopes were presented in a position paper and delineated the following steps that must be followed during disinfection. These steps include pressure/leak testing after each use, disconnecting all air and water suction valves, meticulously cleaning channels, the outside of the entire endoscope, and all valves and connectors with an enzymatic detergent. This is followed by flushing and brushing all accessible channels to remove all organic (e.g., blood, tissue) and other residues. All surfaces must be accessed. Brushes appropriate for the channels must be used, and bristles must contact all internal surfaces of the channels. Ultrasonic cleaning of the endoscopes is used to remove soil and organic material from hard-to-clean channels inaccessible to brushes. The FDA requires disinfection with 2% glutaraldehyde for 20 minutes at 20 degrees C. The endoscope must be completely immersed in the high level disinfectant/sterilant to ensure that all channels are perfused. An automated endoscope washer-disinfector is used to ensure that all channels are adequately disinfected. Before this process is initiated, channel connectors are attached to ensure exposure of all internal surfaces with the high level disinfectant/sterilant. If this process is interrupted, disinfection process must be initiated from the beginning. "Because of design flaws of the endoscope, the staff must routinely test for infectious organisms that may be left in the channels". After high level disinfection, the channels must be rinsed with sterile, filtered or tap water to remove the disinfectant/sterilant. This is followed by flushing the channels with 70% to 90% ethyl alcohol and drying the channels with forced air. The disinfectant/sterilant is highly irritating to the colon if left inside the channels. A clinical picture similar to acute peritonitis may ensue if the colon is exposed to this noxious chemical. Personnel must use protective equipment such as gowns, eyewear, and respiratory protection devices to protect workers from exposure to the noxious chemicals. (Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, Volume 58 Number 1, July 2003 page 1).

This arduous process is necessary to avoid infection primarily because of the convoluted long and narrow channels of the endoscopes. Most infections have occurred because bio-

burden was not completely removed from the channels. Sterilization is rendered useless if manual cleaning is not performed perfectly.

OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

An object of the present invention is to provide an improved endoscope, particularly a flexible fiberoptic endoscope.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an endoscope that is easier to clean and maintain than conventional endoscopes.

These and other objects of the present invention will be apparent from the drawings and descriptions herein. While it is believed that each object of the invention is attained in at least one embodiment of the invention, there is not necessarily any one embodiment that achieves all of the objects of the invention.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention contemplates a flexible endoscope that is easier to clean and maintain by having the working channels and suction/irrigation channel positioned on the outer wall of an endoscope and having said channels with at least a portion being open along the length of the scope's flexible insertion member.

An endoscope in accordance with the present invention comprises a flexible elongate insertion shaft, an illumination guide extending longitudinally through the insertion shaft, and an image guide extending longitudinally through the insertion shaft, the insertion shaft being formed along an outer surface with at least one longitudinally extending channel longitudinally traversable by an elongate endoscopic instrument, the channel having a longitudinally extending slot.

Pursuant to a feature of the present invention, the endoscope further comprises a closure member removably connected to the insertion shaft to close the slot. Where the channel has a distal end opening and proximal end opening, the slot extending from the distal end opening to the proximal end opening, the closure member closes the slot while maintaining the distal end opening and the proximal end opening unobstructed. The closure member may take the form of an endoscope sheath circumferentially surrounding the insertion shaft. Alternatively, where the insertion shaft is formed with a pair of opposing edges along the slot, the closure member may take the form of an elongate strip removably attached to the insertion shaft at the edges. In the latter case, at least one of the closure member and the insertion shaft may be provided with a groove, while the other is inserted into the groove to removably attach the closure member to the insertion shaft.

Pursuant to another feature of the present invention, the endoscope may include a catheter removably disposed in the channel to serve as a channel liner. The catheter may be held in the channel by a snap-lock fit, where the catheter is made of a resilient material and has a diameter larger than the width of the slot in the channel. Alternatively or additionally, where a closure member such as a sheath is provided, the closure member may hold the catheter in the channel. In the case of a sheath, the catheter may be fastened to the sheath.

The catheter and the closure member each assist in the passing of endoscopic accessories along the channel or allow for the application of suction and/or irrigation along the endoscope insertion shaft.

The sheath is preferably an elongate strip wound about the insertion shaft and provided with an adhesive closure. More

3

specifically, the sheath may take the form of an elongate web member or strip disposable in a tubular configuration in engagement with the endoscope insertion member and provided with a tensile member serving as a tear string. The tear string preferably extends longitudinally along the web member. In addition, the tear string preferably extends from one end of the web member to an opposite end thereof.

The sheath is provided in a plurality of regions with a layer of adhesive material. The adhesive material of at least one of the regions is permanent adhesive, whereas the adhesive material of at least another of the regions forms a separable bond. These regions extend along opposing longitudinal edges of the web member, at least where web member is a rectangular sheet.

The sheath may be provided with an end cap securable over a distal tip of the endoscope insertion member in a fluid tight engagement with the web member. The end cap is secured or securable to an end of the web member. The end cap is provided with an opening alignable with the external channel on the endoscope insertion member.

The catheter may be provided at a proximal end with connectors for coupling the catheter to a source of irrigation fluid and a source of suction.

Pursuant to additional features of the present invention, the channel extends from a proximal end portion of the insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof, has a mostly circular cross-section divided by the slot, and is defined by a surface of the insertion member having a C-shaped cross-section.

In one embodiment of the invention, the channel is a one of a pair of channels formed along the outer surface of the insertion shaft, the channels being circumferentially spaced from one another. The channels may, for example, be disposed along diametrically opposed sides of the insertion member.

In another embodiment of the invention, the channel has a pair of lobes, each defined by a surface of the insertion member having a C-shaped cross-section. A catheter insertable into this dual-lobe channel has a cross-section substantially in the form of a FIG. 8.

An endoscope in accordance with the present invention may be packaged as an endoscope assembly comprising (a) an elongate flexible endoscope insertion member provided with at least one channel along an outer cylindrical surface, the channel being open along the surface, and (b) an elongate closure member removably attachable to the insertion member so as to close the channel along the cylindrical surface. As discussed above, the closure member may take the form of a sheath windable about the insertion member or, alternatively, an elongate strip removably attached to the insertion shaft at edges of a slot therein which communicates with the channel. The assembly may also comprise a catheter removably disposable in the channel.

An endoscope in accordance with the present invention has a flexible insertion member provided with an external or outer layer of biocompatible elastomeric material that is sufficiently rigid to substantially maintain its shape yet enough flexibility to accommodate the range of expected endoscope use configurations. The channels may be of more than one size, limited essentially by the size of the endoscope. The channels may be utilized for a variety of medical activities including, but not limited to, irrigation, suction, biopsy, injection, and tissue and foreign body extraction.

The present invention greatly facilitates endoscope cleaning and sterilization owing to the ease of access to all surface of the endoscope that may come into contact with biomaterials. The irrigation, suction and biopsy channels are all part of the continuous external surface of the endoscope insertion

4

member and are easily cleaned. The present invention obviates the following cleaning and sterilization processes necessary to the continued use of conventional endoscopes having biopsy channel open only at the distal tip and the proximal terminus: 20 minutes of soaking, complete immersion of the scope in a cleaning liquid, special brushing, forced delivery of cleaning fluid, forced delivery of rinsing solution, ultrasonic cleaning, and air pressure drying.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an exploded schematic perspective view of an endoscope assembly or kit in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a schematic perspective view of the endoscope assembly of FIG. 1 in a partially assembled configuration.

FIG. 3 is a schematic distal end elevational view of a modified endoscope assembly in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 4 is an exploded schematic perspective view of another endoscope assembly or kit in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a schematic perspective view of the endoscope assembly of FIG. 4 in a partially assembled configuration.

FIG. 6 is a schematic distal end elevational view of another modified endoscope assembly in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a schematic isometric view, on an enlarged scale, of an endoscope insertion member provided with an external, open biopsy channel and a slidable closure member in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a schematic isometric view, partially cut away and on an even larger scale, of a portion of the endoscope insertion member with the channel and slidable closure of FIG. 7.

FIG. 9 is a schematic isometric view, also partially cut away and on the larger scale, of the detail encircled at IX in FIG. 7.

FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a proximal end of an endoscope in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 11 is a perspective view of a proximal end of another endoscope in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

As depicted in FIGS. 1 and 2, an endoscope assembly comprises a flexible elongate insertion member or shaft 10, a pair of catheters 12 and 14, a sheath 16, and optionally an end cap 18. Insertion shaft 10 includes a longitudinally extending illumination guide 20 and a longitudinally extending image guide 22. Image guide 22 may take the form of a fiber-optic bundle or, alternatively, an electrical cable. In the latter case, a charged coupled device or other camera (not shown) is disposed at the distal end 24 of the insertion shaft 10 for converting incoming electromagnetic waves into a digitized electrical signal encoding video images. In either case, a lens 26 is provided at the distal tip of image guide 22 for focusing the incoming electromagnetic waves.

As further depicted in FIGS. 1 and 2, insertion shaft 10 is provided along an external surface (not separately designated) with a pair of C-profile channels 28 and 30 approximately opposing one another. Channels 28 and 30 communicate with the ambient environment not only via respective distal end openings 32 and 34 and proximal end openings (not shown) but also via respective longitudinal slots 36 and 38. Slots 36 and 38 are defined by opposing longitudinal edges 36a, 36b and 38a, 38b formed along the outer surface of endoscope insertion shaft 10. Channels 28 and 30 each have

a transverse dimension or diameter, while the respective slots **36** and **38** each have transverse dimension or width (distance between opposing longitudinal edges **36a** and **36b** for slot **36** or between edges **38a**, **38b** for slot **38**) substantially smaller than the transverse dimension or diameter of the respective channel. Opposing longitudinal edges **36a**, **36b** and **38a**, **38b** are along turned-in portions of the outer surface of endoscope insertion shaft **10**, that is, opposing longitudinal edges **36a**, **36b** (or **38a**, **38b**) extend towards one another to define the C-shaped profile of the channels **28**, **30**.

An exit aperture **40** of illumination guide **20** forms a working light source for the endoscope. That aperture **40** and viewing lens **26** are positioned approximately at the center of the endoscope insertion shaft **10** to allow for adequate configuration of the scope control assembly so that the distal end **24** of the endoscope can be maneuvered in much the same manner as in current endoscopes.

Generally, it is preferred that catheters **12** and **14** are disposed in channels **28** and **30** during use of the endoscope assembly inside a patient. The catheters **28** and **30** have diameters that are larger than the widths of slots **36** and **38** but smaller than the diameters of channels **28** and **30**. Thus, as indicated by an arrow **42** in FIG. 2, catheters **12** and **14** may be slid longitudinally into channels **28** and **30** during an assembly procedure. Alternatively, catheters **12** and **14** may be made a material that is sufficiently resilient to permit a transverse introduction of the catheters into channels **28** and **30**, i.e., through slots **36** and **38**.

Preferably after the disposition of catheters **12** and **14** in channels **28** and **30**, sheath **16** is wound about and attached to insertion shaft **10**. Sheath **16** takes the form of an elongate rectangular web member or strip disposable in a tubular configuration in engagement with endoscope insertion member **10** and provided with a tensile member **44** serving as a tear string. Tear string **44** extends longitudinally along the sheath **16** from a distal end of sheath **16** to a proximal end thereof.

Sheath **16** is provided along a transversely extending edge region **46** and a first longitudinal edge region **48** with a layer of releasable adhesive. The adhesive material of region **46** and **48** forms a separable bond. Sheath **16** is further provided on a second longitudinal edge region **50** with a layer of permanent adhesive material. Protective cover strips **52**, **54**, and **56** are removably attached to the adhesive layers of regions **46**, **48**, and **50** at the time of manufacture. To attach sheath **16** to insertion shaft **10**, cover strips **52**, **54**, and **56** are removed from adhesive regions **46**, **48**, and **50**. Endoscope insertion member **10** is then placed over the longitudinal center of sheath **16** as shown in FIG. 2. The half of the sheath **16** longitudinally bounded by adhesive region **48** is then wrapped around insertion shaft **10**. Regions **46** and **48** are pressed to the outer surface of the shaft to form a temporary bond thereto. Then the other half of sheath **16**, which is longitudinally bound by adhesive region **50**, is wrapped around shaft **10**, with region **50** being pressed against an outer surface of the sheath to form a permanent bond therewith. The assembled configuration, minus the catheters **12** and **14**, is shown in FIG. 3.

Sheath **16** is preferably made of a fine film material that would be easily punctured or torn by insertion of an endoscopic surgical or diagnostic instrument. A catheter **12** or **14** that used for the insertion of endoscopic instruments thus serves to protect sheath **16** from inadvertent damage. The other catheter **14** or **12** is provided at a proximal end with connectors or couplings **58** and **60** for the operative engagement of a suction source **62** and an irrigation fluid supply **64**.

Accordingly, one channel **28** or **30** serves for the passage of endoscopic accessories such as forceps, snares, needles, etc.

(none shown), while the other channel **30** or **28** permits connection to suction source **62** and irrigation fluid source **64**. These "C" channels **28** and **30** are substantially easier to clean and disinfect than the biopsy channel of conventional endoscopes since the channels **28** and **30** are open on the outside of the scope, allowing for easy brushing and full contact with disinfectant.

As an optional step in the preparation of the endoscope assembly for use in a patient, end cap **18** may be placed over the distal end **24** of insertion shaft **10** prior to the placement of shaft **10** on the open sheath **16** and concomitantly prior to the wrapping of sheath **16** about shaft **10**. In that case, adhesive region **46** is placed into contact with an annular flange **66** of end cap **18**. In this case, adhesive region **46** may be provided with a permanent adhesive for firmly gripping the end cap. End cap **18** is provided with openings **68** and **69** alignable with channels **28** and **30**, respectively.

As illustrated in FIGS. 4-6, another endoscope assembly comprises a flexible elongate insertion member or shaft **70**, a pair of catheters **72** and **74**, a sheath **76**, and optionally an end cap **78**. Insertion shaft **70** includes a longitudinally extending illumination guide **80** and a longitudinally extending image guide **82**. Image guide **82** may take the form of a fiber-optic bundle or, alternatively, an electrical cable. In the latter case, a charged coupled device or other camera (not shown) is disposed at the distal end **84** of the insertion shaft **70** for converting incoming electromagnetic waves into a digitized electrical signal. In either case, a lens **86** is provided at the distal tip of image guide **82** for focusing the incoming electromagnetic waves.

As further depicted in FIGS. 4 and 5, insertion shaft **70** is provided along an external surface (not separately designated) with a pair of contiguous C-profile channels **88** and **90**. Channels **88** and **90** communicate with the ambient environment not only via a mutual dual-lobe distal end opening **92** and one or more proximal end openings (not shown) but also via a common longitudinal slot **96**. Slot **96** is defined by opposing longitudinal edges **96a**, **96b** formed along the outer surface of endoscope insertion shaft **70**.

An exit aperture **100** of illumination guide **80** forms a working light source for the endoscope. Aperture **100** and viewing lens **86** are positioned approximately at the center of the endoscope insertion shaft **70** to allow for adequate configuration of the scope control assembly so that the distal end **84** of the endoscope can be maneuvered in much the same manner as in current endoscopes.

Generally, it is preferred that catheters **72** and **74** are disposed in channels **88** and **90** during use of the endoscope assembly inside a patient. Catheters **88** and **90** have a combined width that is larger than the width of slot **96**. Catheters **88** and **90** have respective diameters that are smaller than the diameters of channels **88** and **90**. Thus, as indicated by an arrow **102** in FIG. 5, catheters **72** and **74** may be slid longitudinally into channels **88** and **90** during an assembly procedure. Alternatively, catheters **72** and **74** may be made a material that is sufficiently resilient to permit a transverse introduction of the catheters into channels **88** and **90**, i.e., through slot **96**.

As shown in FIG. 4, catheters **72** and **74** may be pre-attached to sheath **76**. In that case, catheters **72** and **74** must be inserted into channels **88** and **90** prior to a wrapping of sheath **76** about insertion shaft **70** and an adhesive attachment thereto as discussed above with reference to FIGS. 1-3. Sheath **76** is thus similar to sheath **16** except for the pre-attachment of catheters **72** and **74**.

Accordingly, one channel **88** or **90** serves for the passage of endoscopic accessories such as forceps, snares, needles, etc.

(none shown), while the other channel **90** or **88** permits connection to suction source **122** and irrigation fluid source **124**. These "C" channels **88** and **90** are substantially easier to clean and disinfect than the biopsy channel of conventional endoscopes since the channels **88** and **90** are open on the outside of the scope, allowing for easy brushing and full contact with disinfectant.

As an optional step in the preparation of the endoscope assembly for use in a patient, end cap **78** may be placed over the distal end **84** of insertion shaft **70**. End cap **78** is provided with a dual-lobe opening **126** alignable with channels **88** and **90**.

It is possible to omit both catheters **12** and **14** from the assembly of FIGS. 1-3 and similarly to omit both catheters **72** and **74** from the assembly of FIGS. 4-6. In that case, the endoscopic instruments inserted through a channel **28** or **30** and **88** or **90** preferably have blunt tips resulting in a reduced probability of damage to sheaths **16** and **76**. Sheaths **16** and **76** have sufficient strength and are wound sufficiently tight to enable the transmission of fluids under negative pressure (suction) or positive pressure (irrigation) through the other channel.

In another variation of the embodiments of FIGS. 1-3 and 4-6, it is possible to use catheters **12** and **14** without sheath **16** and catheters **72** and **74** without sheath **76**. Catheters **12** and **14** are held in channels **28** and **30** and catheters **72** and **74** in channels **88** and **90** by virtue of the geometry of the catheters and the channels. The diameters of the catheters and the channels may be so close that the catheters are held in the channels by a friction lock fit. In this case, catheters **72** and **74** may be connected to one another along their lengths to form a double lumen catheter. One lumen of this double lumen catheter has a connector at the proximal end for the suction and irrigation apparatus while the second lumen is used for endoscopic accessories. At the start of the procedure the sterile "FIG. 8" catheter is inserted into the "C" channel of the endoscope and secured there by either a compression fit, sheath **76** or other mechanism appropriate to the scope and clinical procedure. At the conclusion of the endoscopic procedure, if used, would be disposed of as well as the "FIG. 8" catheter. The scope can then be easily cleaned and disinfected. In another design (not shown) the FIG. 8 catheter is inserted through one "C" channel **88** or **90** only with one of the loops of the FIG. 8. The other lumen would protrude out.

In a further variation of the embodiment of FIGS. 1-3, at least one of the channels **28** and **30** may be used in a naked condition, without a catheter **12**, **14** and without sheath **16**. In that case, endoscopic instruments are inserted through that channel **28** or **30** and are maintained in the channel because the respective slot **36** or **38** is too narrow to permit the escape of the instrument shaft from the channel. If irrigation or suction is necessary for the particular endoscopic procedure, the other channel **30** or **28** is provided with a respective catheter **14** or **12** for the conduction of fluids in the proximal direction in the case of suction and in the distal direction in the case of irrigation.

As illustrated in FIGS. 7-9, an endoscope insertion member or shaft **130** is formed along an outer surface **132** with a longitudinal channel **138** having a pair of opposing edges **134** and **136** defining a longitudinal slot **140**. An elongate closure member **142** made, for instance, of a thermoplastic resin material, is slidably engaged with insertion member **130** along edges **134** and **136** to cover or close slot **140** during at least a portion of an endoscopic investigation. Channel **138** has a substantially circular cross-section, while closure member **142** is substantially disposed only outside of that circular cross-section, the closure member being configured to not

protrude into the channel and to substantially maintain and complete the circumference of the circular cross-section thereof. Closure member has a pair of parallel longitudinal edges that engage respective opposing edges **134** and **136** to close slot **140**.

As shown in FIG. 8, edges **134** and **136** may be formed with respective ribs **144** and **146** that are received in respective grooves **148** and **150** on closure member **142**. As shown in FIG. 9, closure member **142** is provided with a pivotably mounted pull-tab **152** in turn formed with an eyelet **154**. Pull-tab **152** serves as an entrainment element enabling a technician or endoscopist to pull closure member **142** along slot **140** at least during an installation operation prior to a diagnostic or therapeutic endoscopic procedure. Pull-tab **152** is preferably provided at a proximal end of closure member **142**. Together with closure member **142**, a tool with a hook (not shown) may be provided as part of an endoscope closure kit, where the hook is inserted through eyelet **154** for entrainment purposes. Another kind of entrainment element engageable by such a hook tool would be a simple aperture or recess in the closure member **142**.

FIG. 10 depicts the proximal end of an endoscope insertion member **188** having a biopsy channel **156** open along its length as described hereinabove. Channel **156** extends in the proximal direction along insertion member **154** to a stiff biopsy channel entry port **158** that diverges outwardly from the insertion member. A tubular channel liner **164** in the form of a catheter resiliently and removably snaps into the open channel **156**. At a proximal end, liner **164** extends out 1-2 cm and is covered by a rubber end cap **160** attached with a pressure fit. End cap **160** is made of a polymeric material and is provided with a valve port **166** through which a flexible endoscopic instrument (not shown) may be inserted into channel liner **164** and along the length of channel **156**. A control head **168** has directional control knobs **170**, irrigation and suction ports **172** and an eyepiece **174**.

As depicted in FIG. 11, a channel liner **184** in the form of a catheter lays in an open biopsy channel **180** along the shaft or insertion member **154** of the endoscope until a bifurcation **179** between the shaft or insertion member and a biopsy channel entry port **176**, which is not flexible. Here liner **184** enters a closed channel segment or lumen **178**. Liner **184** exits from a proximal end of the biopsy channel entry port **176** and extends out for about 1-2 cm. A rubber end cap **182** then is pressure fitted to the free, extending end (not shown) of liner **184**. Liner **184** resiliently and removably snaps into the open channel **180**.

End caps or port elements **160** and **182** are placed on the channel liners **164**, **184** about 2-3 inches from the endoscope insertion member **154**. Once an endoscopic procedure has been completed using the endoscope of FIG. 10 or 11, one can cut off end cap or port element **160** or **182** from the respective biopsy channel liner **164** or **184**, plug up the channel liner, and then pull it out of the open biopsy channel **156**, **180**. This procedure facilitates the maintenance of cleanliness. Brushing, cleaning and rinsing procedures are simplified if not obviated.

Of FIGS. 10 and 11, the preferred embodiment here is FIG. 11 because entry port **176**, where instruments are first inserted, is completely surrounded by solid matter. There is an angle between the entry port **176** and the endoscope shaft **154**. If the channel **178** were open, the liner **184** with an endoscopic instrument inside could pop out. Moreover, the entrance way provides more protection during the critical entry of the operating instrument.

Although the invention has been described in terms of particular embodiments and applications, one of ordinary

9

skill in the art, in light of this teaching, can generate additional embodiments and modifications without departing from the spirit of or exceeding the scope of the claimed invention. Accordingly, it is to be understood that the drawings and descriptions herein are proffered by way of example to facilitate comprehension of the invention and should not be construed to limit the scope thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A flexible endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft incorporating an image-carrying component and having a circumference, said insertion shaft being formed with at least one longitudinally extending substantially circular channel, said channel including a longitudinal slot contiguous with an outer surface of said insertion shaft, said slot having a transverse dimension smaller than any diameter of said channel; a closure member configured to close said channel, said closure member being an elongate strip formed with a pair of parallel longitudinal edges configured to attach to respective opposing edges of said longitudinal slot of said insertion member, at least one of said closure member and said insertion shaft being provided with a groove, the other of said closure member and said insertion shaft being insertable into said groove to removably attach said closure member to said insertion shaft, said closure member completing the circumference of said insertion member.

2. The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel has a distal end opening and proximal end opening, said slot extending from said distal end opening to said proximal end opening, said closure member closing said slot while maintaining said distal end opening and said proximal end opening unobstructed.

3. The endoscope defined in claim 1, further comprising a catheter disposed in said channel.

4. The endoscope defined in claim 3 wherein said closure member is disposed over said channel and said catheter.

5. The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein at a proximal end said channel terminates at an entry port bifurcated with respect to and diverging from said shaft, further comprising a biopsy channel liner removably disposed in said channel and extending at a proximal end out of said entry port, an end cap being fitted to said liner at said entry port.

10

6. The endoscope defined in claim 5 wherein said entry port defines a closed lumen communicating with said channel.

7. The endoscope defined in claim 5 wherein said channel continues open along said entry port.

8. The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said channel extends from a proximal end portion of said insertion shaft to a distal tip thereof.

9. The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said closure member is slidably connected to said insertion shaft, said closure member being provided with an entrainment element for facilitating manipulation of said closure member to slide said closure member along said slot.

10. The endoscope defined in claim 9, wherein said entrainment member is a pull tab.

11. The endoscope defined in claim 1 wherein said outer surface of said insertion shaft is a first outer surface and said closure member has a second outer surface, said second outer surface being smoothly continuous with said first outer surface.

12. The endoscope defined in claim 11 wherein said closure member is arcuate in transverse cross-section, completing the circumference of said insertion member.

13. A flexible video endoscope comprising a flexible elongate insertion shaft incorporating a video-image-carrying component and having a circumference, said insertion shaft being formed with at least one longitudinally extending substantially circular channel, said channel including a longitudinal slot contiguous with an outer surface of said insertion shaft, said slot having a transverse dimension smaller than any diameter of said channel; a closure member configured to close said channel, said closure member being an elongate strip formed with a pair of parallel longitudinal edges configured to attach to respective opposing edges of said longitudinal slot of said insertion member, at least one of said closure member and said insertion shaft being provided with a groove, the other of said closure member and said insertion shaft being insertable into said groove to removably attach said closure member to said insertion shaft, said closure member completing the circumference of said insertion member.

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